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PROGRAM The Today Show STATION WRC TV  
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DATE February 4, 1982 7:00 AM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT Interview with Foreign Minister D'Escoto

JANE PAULEY: Are we facing a confrontation of the superpowers in Central America? The Reagan Administration is backing the government of El Salvador and alleges a Soviet threat in the present government of nearby neighbor Nicaragua.

Here is Secretary of State Haig before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee earlier this week.

SECRETARY OF STATE ALEXANDER HAIG: Nicaragua is being exploited as a base for the export of subversion and armed intervention throughout Central America. Inside Nicaragua, Soviet, East European, and Cuban military advisers are building Central America's largest military establishment with Soviet-supplied arms.

PAULEY: Nicaragua's Foreign Minister is our guest this morning, Miguel D'Escoto.

Good morning.

FOREIGN MINISTER MIGUEL D'ESCOTO: Good morning.

PAULEY: Is Nicaragua being exploited by the Soviet Bloc, by Cuba?

FOREIGN MINISTER D'ESCOTO: Unfortunately, this is a lie which the Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, has been repeating, and he repeated it only yesterday. He doesn't seem to have learned any lessons from the Vietnam experience. The American people are still being lied to in order to excuse...

PAULEY: ...learning from the Cuban experience, which

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is another story, as you would know.

FOREIGN MINISTER D'ESCOTO: Well, I don't know what is to be learned from the Cuban experience about the Nicaraguan situation.

PAULEY: Do you deny that there are 500 Soviet Bloc advisers in Nicaragua now? Some foreign observers and reporters say it looks like an international city these days?

FOREIGN MINISTER D'ESCOTO: I don't only deny that there's 500 Soviet advisers, there's not one Soviet adviser in Nicaragua.

PAULEY: There are 500 observed Soviet people there. What are they doing? They live near the Soviet Embassy. It's not terribly secret.

FOREIGN MINISTER D'ESCOTO: I cannot tell you the exact number of the Soviet people connected to the embassy. But I can tell you that it's infinitely smaller than that of the American people connected to the embassy.

PAULEY: And a thousand or several thousand, perhaps, Cuban teachers in Nicaragua. That you would not deny. What do they teach?

FOREIGN MINISTER D'ESCOTO: Well, they are teaching in elementary schools. They are helping to set up schools throughout the country. We have a couple of hundred of them that are medical doctors helping to extend the health services to our entire population that had been deprived of them for so many years.

PAULEY: But you can understand, surely, why the Reagan Administration would see a number of Soviet people in Managua, of Cuban teachers, and not -- and legitimately feel threatened that some kind of a military machine is being built near strategic interests of the United States. The Panama Canal, for instance.

FOREIGN MINISTER D'ESCOTO: Well, you know, this is a story that we have been hearing all of our history. This is what led the United States to invade and occupy Nicaragua in 1909 and then in 1912, an occupation that lasted until 1933 and that was replaced by the surrogate army that the United States imposed on Nicaragua and through which it held control of our country until 1979. At that time, they were said -- they said that we were in danger of becoming a second Mexico. Today they claim that we're in danger of becoming a second Cuba.

This is nothing more than a pretext to excuse their criminal interventionist policies in Central America, and in Nicaragua in particular.

PAULEY: You were in the Soviet Union last fall, I believe, and signed some agreements, the contents of which have never been made public. How far would the Soviet Union be prepared to go if the United States did engage in some direct military action in El Salvador or elsewhere in Central America?

FOREIGN MINISTER D'ESCOTO: Well, I think that that has to be asked of the Soviet people. I cannot say that...

PAULEY: And you don't have anything on paper, agreements specifying when they would come to your aid, how much military assistance they might provide?

FOREIGN MINISTER D'ESCOTO: There's no such an agreement with the Soviet Union.

PAULEY: You did sign an agreement.

FOREIGN MINISTER D'ESCOTO: Not any kind of a military agreement. We have aid agreements in different areas, in education, in health, but no military agreements.

PAULEY: Tell me what you think the scenario in Central America will be in another year.

FOREIGN MINISTER D'ESCOTO: If left to ourselves, I think that by next year we will have another country liberated from the terrible nightmare that they have lived through, certainly, for most of the part of this year -- of this century.

PAULEY: The Salvadoran guerrillas will win.

FOREIGN MINISTER D'ESCOTO: I have no doubt that they would if they were left alone without American intervention and without the United States trying to bolster up and defend a regime that is so...

PAULEY: But do you think they will be left [alone], or do you think the United States in another year will be directly involved in El Salvador?

FOREIGN MINISTER D'ESCOTO: I have confidence in the American people. And I think that in this country the will of the people still counts and that they will take advantage of that democratic possibility in this country and restrain the Reagan Administration from further irresponsible actions.

PAULEY: Foreign Minister Miguel D'Escoto, thank you for being our guest.